Fusion System
Frequently Asked Questions
February 22, 2006

What does the Fusion System do?
- Facilitates prevention, early warning and coordinated response to natural, accidental, and intentional disasters
- Expands the insight of law enforcement, public health, fire, and emergency management personnel in the field, responding to emergencies, and investigating incidents

What are the components of the Fusion System?
The Fusion System includes software for sharing, data storage, analysis and reporting; redundant, secure and networked computers; extensive data and numerous database interfaces; cross-organizational processes and procedures; and visualization technology. The computer system is located in McKinney but can be web accessed by authorized personnel from their offices.

How is the Fusion System unique?
It is one of the first systems in the nation that brings together public health, law enforcement, fire, and emergency management data for cross-discipline analysis.

It is one of the first systems in the nation to focus on the prevention of terrorism and early detection of public health epidemics. It brings together powerful analysis tools to "connect-the-dots" to detect pre-incident indicators before large-scale incidents occur.

What are the benefits of the Fusion System to the county?
The benefits include better prevention, early warning, and response to natural, intentional, and accidental disasters. Law enforcement, public health, fire and emergency management will have access to cross-jurisdictional and cross-discipline information (within legal constraints) that they have never had before. Emergency managers will have access to a much broader amount of data during an emergency. Examples include local weather details, appraisal district information, availability of hospital resources and information on traffic flow.   Analysts could detect early indicators of threats, crime patterns and emerging diseases that threaten the county.

Field and investigative personnel will have more information to make decisions and take actions. The cross-jurisdictional and cross-organizational information that the Fusion System provides will enable field and investigative personnel to better recognize criminals, criminal activities, arson patterns and disease trends. For example, a law enforcement officer who stops a suspicious person will be able to see all the available law enforcement information on the person.

Who are the users? When do they start using the system?
The operational stakeholders include homeland security, law enforcement, public health, fire and emergency management personnel who are analysts, work in the field, respond to emergencies or investigate incidents. The rollout to users has begun and the initial rollout to the county and city organizations is expected to be completed by July 1. The subsequent refinement of the system and the training of new users will be ongoing.

Who staffs the Fusion System?
The Intelligence Analyst, the Health Analyst, and a Back-up Analyst.

What does the Intelligence Analyst do?
The Intelligence Analyst proactively and upon request uses tools to identify potential threats and bring them to the attention of the appropriate authorities. He interacts with analysts from other organizations such as the joint terrorism task force and the FBI.

What does the Health Analyst do?
The Health Analyst monitors syndromic surveillance information, information from the Centers for Disease Control, and recorded cases of contagious diseases.

How was the Fusion System funded?
Funds came from Homeland Security and Centers for Disease Control grants supplemented by county appropriated equipment.

Since information sharing across the region would be valuable, why not establish a regional Fusion System?
Yes, the more data and the more users, the more value the system brings. The Fusion System is expandable to support the region. A conference is being held next month for 400 regional stakeholders to learn more about the system. Judges Harris, Kelleher, and Horn have formed an oversight committee and started meetings to oversee the use of the system.

Who is in charge of the Fusion System operations?
The Director of Homeland Security.

Are the computer systems secure?
Yes. The computers are in a physically isolated room with physical security access, monitoring of entry. There are hardware and software firewalls to prevent hacking into the system. Only authorized users with the proper authentification are allowed into the system. The data is stored in directories with access parameters to allow only authorized personnel to see the data.   All use of the system is recorded to provide audit trail evidence if the data is used improperly by authorized users.

How are the regulations on the accessability and use of law enforcement data followed?
The access to law enforcement data is restricted to authorized and approved law enforcement personnel only. There is an approval process for approving users and for designating what data they are authorized to see. The system uses a coding scheme to restrict access to data that an individual is not approved to see.

Does the system comply with HIPAA regulations for maintaining the privacy of health information?
Provisions have been put into place to abide by HIPAA regulations but currently there is no private health information in the system. Private health data would be managed and accessed only by the approved health department individuals.

What are the future plans for the Fusion System?
The value of the Fusion System increases with more data, broader data, and more users**.**

What data is in the system?
The data that is currently incorporated or in work includes incident reports, dispatch records, jail records, medical examiner reports, law enforcement data, hospital resource availability information, syndromic surveillance data, weather data, hazardous material sites, Department of Homeland Security reports, Centers for Disease Control reports, Texas Fusion System reports.

Are other groups outside the county participating?
Yes, a number of groups outside the county are providing data and participating in conferences and demonstrations. A regional kickoff was held for 120 stakeholders and an operations-oriented regional conference for 400 stakeholders is being held in March.

Who has participated in maturing the Fusion System concepts?
This month (February), over 60 local, regional, state and federal stakeholders participated in scenario brainstorming sessions. Participants include National Guard, FBI, CDC, National Weather Service, National Geospatial Management Office, DEA, Joint Terrorism Task Force, DFW airport, epidemiologists, fire marshals, appraisers, detectives, medical examiners, hospitals, mass transit, Red Cross, amateur radio and dispatchers.

The scenarios include prevention of a dirty bomb, early detection of avian flu, response to a multi-jurisdictional tornado, support to a patrol officer identifying a child molester, and investigation of an arson.

Is state and federal data accessed by the system?
The Fusion System capabilities are increased by collaboration at the state and national level. Data has already been incorporated from the National Weather Service, the Centers for Disease Control, the Texas Fusion System and the Department of Homeland Security. In the future, particular emphasis will be placed on relationships with the Homeland Security Department and the FBI for the sharing of classified data with regional intelligence analysts. Classified federal agency data could provide valuable tip-offs for regional issues.